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Statement submitted by Federación Española de Mujeres Directivas, Ejecutivas, Profesionales y Empresarias, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The path to women's leadership

The Federación Española de Mujeres Directivas, Ejecutivas, Profesionales y Empresarias would like to stress the importance of promoting women's leadership in the international community. The lack of women in positions of senior corporate and economic responsibility is a constant throughout the world and, in our view, perpetuates gaps in pay, economic independence, growth opportunities and women's contribution to decision-making with regard to implementing solutions.

In Spain, we note that the labour market is ever more hostile toward women, with increased numbers of unemployed women, wage insecurity and a dearth of women in strategic positions of economic power. These setbacks in the professional development of women concern us because we detect that women are more vulnerable in the face of employment dynamics.

Of equal concern is the impact of women's employment vulnerability on social awareness. In this context of greater vulnerability, there is a surge in prejudice and direct discrimination against women, malpractice becomes commonplace, and, above all, a patriarchal view of social roles permeates society, which is something that we have fought against for years.

Nevertheless, at the same time, the growth in entrepreneurial activity and the search for self-employment by women in recent months in response to the economic crisis presents us with a new situation. Within this framework, albeit nascent, the options and possibilities thus presented fill us with cautious hope. The potential impact of new business models led by women may be key to transforming the pervading corporate culture.

Further, the success models for these new businesses, many of which are linked to cutting-edge economic sectors, will showcase the diverse abilities and talents of women. These successes serve as examples of profitable and successful management within the framework of a new business paradigm.

At the Federación Española de Mujeres Directivas, Ejecutivas, Profesionales y Empresarias, we understand that these social changes are evidence of women's willingness to place themselves on the front line when faced with family financial responsibilities and national and global economic challenges. Therefore, we call upon businesses and organizations to respond to that commitment and provide professional opportunities in senior corporate management for women.

It is important to highlight the European Union's legislative commitment in recent years and its cascading effect in national legislations and good governance codes, such as that introduced in Spain by the National Stock Market Commission. These instruments are important, not because they support quotas or the gender-balanced distribution of posts through minimum percentages, but because they place at the centre of the debate the urgent need to face up to changes in the business paradigm in order that equality on paper translates to real, measurable equality in practice. That will be the challenge in the coming years – to bring about a change in the statistics, to even out the percentages where we women are a minority in positions of responsibility, to improve access to finance and to remove the pay gap once and for all.

In the same vein, we would like to appeal to businesses, organizations and civil society to recognize the economic benefits of bringing women into the economy. Various studies by public and private bodies emphasize the profitability associated with having women on corporate boards of directors. Their presence and work enhances, for example, the prediction of consumer needs and improves corporate governance, among other benefits.

Lastly, from a social standpoint, we women plough a large part of our earnings back into society. That fact, highlighted by entities such as Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, is another of the main strategic areas that should promote women's leadership. Women's ability and propensity to redistribute wealth through investment in health, education and better nutrition benefits society as a whole and enhances the well-being of communities.

Women have the know-how, ability and desire to lead business projects and assume financial responsibilities. We are reacting responsibly to the economic difficulties that day by day are becoming more acute for women. We call upon all political, economic and business stakeholders to assume like responsibility and support women's determination to contribute to the overall improvement of our communities.